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# Bold leadership, radical action



**What Bristol  
residents want  
on climate  
change...**



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# Executive summary

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This research set out to establish what ordinary people in Bristol think about climate change, how they talk about it, and how it affects their lives. We asked residents what they know about current local policies, and what they would or would not want to see if changes have to happen in the city.

As a result, this report foregrounds the voices of Bristol residents. We hope it will be of use and interest to all those who live and work in the city, including those who took part and who asked to see the final report; to anyone involved in climate change communication in Bristol, whether in Bristol City Council, the Bristol Green Capital Partnership or other business and civil society organisations; and to Bristol climate change strategy leaders and policy makers, including the One City Environmental Sustainability Board and Bristol City Council and WECA mayors, councillors and officers.

In February and March 2020, a team of eight researchers spoke to 333 residents across Bristol, covering both the centre and the outskirts and selecting as broad a range of people to talk to as possible. We were determined to hear the views of people who don't often get heard by policy makers. Following lockdown, we created an online survey asking the same questions and promoted this through Bristol 24-7 and Bristol Post in June 2020. A further 1343 residents took part online, answering an additional question about whether Covid-19 had shifted their views on climate change in any way.

Thanks to the huge volume of responses to our online survey, we collected a unique data set given its time of collection and breadth of participation. There is far more information there to unearth and share,

and this report is the first of several that we hope to write. However, early analysis of the interviews and responses led to the following insights:

- Bristol residents are concerned about climate change and this fear both motivates willingness to change and holds people back from action.
- Transport is the biggest area of concern, talked about both before and during the Covid-19 lockdown.
- Residents are willing to see radical change in the city and are frustrated with the lack of visible steps that have been taken so far.
- Equality and fairness is important to Bristolians, including an expectation that all sectors should pull their weight and that the costs of adaptation should not be carried by, or lead to the exclusion of, those least able to pay.
- Residents expect a high level of integrity from Bristol City Council and goodwill towards the council is undermined when policies are perceived as contradictory or not followed through.

In the report, we reflect on what Bristol residents had to say through the prism of the One City Climate Strategy, in order to see how well the aspirations and implications of that plan are understood and endorsed by Bristolians. Our observations about that are summarised in a series of brief recommendations at the end of the report, reflecting on aspects of climate change communication that could catalyse action. We hope that the report makes a useful contribution to the ongoing conversation about Bristol's response to the climate emergency.

**Jack Nicholls**  
**Hen Wilkinson**  
**Emilia Melville**  
 November 2020



# Research approach

The research set out to bring residents' views and experiences about the impacts of the climate emergency on Bristol to strategic leadership teams in the run up to the Mayoral elections set for May 2020. In the event, those elections were postponed because of Covid-19 (now due to be held in 2021, date to be confirmed at time of writing). However, as data collection was already well underway, the research continued through lockdown, shifting the focus to include residents' views about mitigation strategies required to face climate challenges.

## Research team

The research was led by three senior researchers connected to the University of Bristol and with links to two Bristol-based organisations, [Community Resolve](#) and [Zero West](#). The research project had the backing of the Bristol Inclusive Economy Initiative and the School of Geographical Sciences. It also provided an opportunity to train and support a team of eight University of Bristol postgraduates and undergraduates in the research process, supported by the university's Professional Liaison Network. Over several months, the student researchers became deeply involved in all aspects of the qualitative research process from data collection and analysis through to contributions to this

final report. The depth of the information generated and in this report is thanks to their exceptional work from early to mid 2020.

## Methodology

The research team worked in pairs across the city, talking to residents about what they knew and felt about the policies and strategies in place to tackle climate emergency impacts in Bristol. By sending researchers out across the entire city, we were deliberately looking to engage people of the widest range of backgrounds, and especially wanted to talk to residents whose views on climate change are not usually heard. Through January, February and early March 2020, researchers used a short 10-minute interview to collect information on:

- How people in the city think and talk about climate change and its impacts in the city
- Specific concerns, hopes and wants of different communities across the city
- Levels of awareness and acceptance of Bristol City Council's climate policies and activities
- Ideas for action.



## Interview questions

1. Can I start by asking your postcode?
2. What comes to mind when you think of climate change?
3. How does it make you feel?
4. Are you aware of any planned changes in the city in relation to climate change?
5. Can you give us an example of a change local to you?
6. Are there any future changes you would want to see? Why?
7. Any you wouldn't want to see? Why?
8. Where do you get your information about the city? And about future plans?
9. What makes it believable? Do you trust some sources more than others?
10. Anything else you would like to add?

### Additional question for the online survey:

Has Covid-19 affected your views on 'what actions to take in relation to climate change? If so, how?

***'The best thing about taking part in the research has been meeting people that we wouldn't usually talk to and getting to know Bristol residents outside of the usual 'bubble'. I really liked this being so local to Bristol'***

*Feedback from trainee researcher on the team*

The research team had completed 333 interviews before face-to-face interviews had to stop in mid March as Covid-19 took hold in the UK. However, we also posted the survey questions online and a further 1343 Bristol residents answered the same set of questions online, with the addition of one question asking whether the experience of Covid-19 had changed their thinking in relation to climate change.

The team then moved on to identifying key themes and ideas in the responses we had collected, working both individually, in pairs and as a whole team with the research leads. We put our main focus on the responses from the people we spoke to face to face, as we recognise that those who took part in the survey might already have had a stronger interest in climate change than those we spoke at random. As a result, the themes presented in this report are led by those we found in the face-to-face interviews, which were then double checked against the online survey responses.



A	B	C	D	E
63	sustainability theme			
	Main codes	Subcodes	Definition	Comments on codebook
1	actor	Main code definition	People or organisations who might take action	
2	actor	n/a		
3	actor	social movement	includes XR, environmental movement, activists	
4	actor	business	includes supermarkets, corporations, companies, businesses	
5	actor	council	includes local government, bristol council,	
6	actor	national government	includes state, government	
7	actor	individual		
8	actor	other	any organisation or type of person who could take action not included in categories above	
9	action	Main code definition	actions that are/could be or should be taken by various parties, in various ways.	
10	action	n/a		
11	action	policy	taxes, laws, council or government based actions, policies	
12	action	chvic	protest, organising, talking to people, holding politicians accountable	
13	action	personal	behaviour change	
14	action	other	actions by businesses, other organisations??	
15	emotion	Main code definition	emotions expressed by respondents or noticed by researcher	
16	emotion	n/a		
17	emotion	anger	frustrated, anger,	
18	emotion	sadness	depressed, sad, grief	
19	emotion	guilt		
20	emotion	hope		
21	emotion	apathetic	disassociated, apathetic, cynical, numb, no emotion, lack of emotion	
22	emotion	fear	anxiety, concern, worry	
23	emotion	agency	engaged, we can do something, power, lack of power,	
24	emotion	other		
25	values	Main code definition	expressing of what is important, what should be taken into account	
26	values	n/a		
27	values	participation	accessibility of information to all, ensuring people can be part of the conversation and decision process	
28	values	distribution	inequality, poverty, affordability, poor people, fair share, green, equality	

# What residents think: a summary of feedback we received

In this section we set out the main themes that emerged from residents' responses to our questions. We draw mainly on the pre-lockdown face-to-face interviews on streets across all Bristol postcodes but also include comments from the online survey where appropriate. Here, we have grouped the main themes that emerged into the following sections:

1. **How climate change is framed**
2. **Awareness of local policies**
3. **How responses differed across the city**
4. **Visions for the future**
5. **Impact of Covid-19 on research responses**
6. **Residents' most talked-about topics**
7. **Taking action: who's responsible?**
8. **Citywide leadership**

## 1. How climate change is framed

We asked Bristol residents a series of questions to try and understand how they frame climate change and what terminology they use to describe it. When asked what came to mind when they thought of or felt about climate change as a whole, residents talked of their fear, sadness and anger. Only 20 people we spoke to questioned the reality of climate change, revealing a widespread consensus across Bristol that climate change is happening and that it is worrying the local population.

Residents had many different points of connection to the topic, ranging from extreme weather events to the destruction of livelihoods, but generally spoke of their fear of global large-scale impacts such as the melting icecaps, the extinction of polar bears or changes in weather patterns. Interestingly, these are all 'far away' conceptualisations of the climate emergency and its impacts. This awareness of the crisis as a long-term issue with future catastrophic effects is reflected in responses we collected across all the questions.



It became clear that many residents are fearful for future generations, especially in relation to their own children or future children and descendants rather than for themselves. Reflecting on how Bristol residents seem to construct the climate emergency as abstract and distant, we wondered how much this disconnect relates to the sorts of information they are receiving on climate change. It was notable that residents referred more easily to large international headlines on the topic, perhaps because these received the most media publicity (the David Attenborough effect) or were more often discussed in social situations.

More than one resident shared their thoughts about how communications around climate could change to give more impetus to local action.

- *'I don't think it will be a difference for me in this lifetime, but I am concerned for other people both in the future and in other places... in poorer countries'*
- *'Future generations are going to see things we can't imagine'*
- *'This is not the world I want to leave for my grandchildren'*

#### Residents' feelings about climate change

Different ways 'emotion' is referred to	Mentions relating to emotion in 333 interviews
Guilt	24
Hope	43
Apathy	77
Sadness	84
Anger	88
Fear	146
Distrust / uncertainty	246

### *'I wish there was more talk about local climate change impacts'*

When we specifically asked people about climate change impacts at a level local to them, many residents struggled to come up with anything they could think of. As one participant said, *'we don't see a lot of the effects of climate change. Floods [are] the main way I think we get affected'*. Most responses related to flooding and *'more extreme weather'*, *'chaotic weather patterns'* and *'crazy weather'*, although in research such as this findings are always influenced by what's happening at the time. There was some exceptionally wet weather in Bristol in late February and early March 2020 as interviews were being collected.

## 2. Awareness of local policies

We also asked questions to try and establish where Bristolians get their ideas about climate change from and how they best take on board – or might take on board – new information, including the need for shifts in their own lifestyles.

There was a noticeable lack of awareness among Bristol residents of current policy and strategic actions already in place. When asked what planned local policy shifts they are aware of, roughly 90% of residents spoke about transport, with some 70% mentioning the Clean Air Zone and generally referring to it as 'the diesel ban'. As the proposed ban was in the news in Bristol and nationally at the time, it was perhaps at the forefront of people's minds. Nonetheless, for many residents 'the ban' seems to be the only policy shift in relation to climate change that they are know of. Policies in other sustainability areas - such as changes in consumption and waste recycling - were mentioned by just half of those who took part in the research.

The focus on transport in people's minds could be because transport issues and the related 'diesel ban' seem more relevant to their lives than other climate mitigation strategies, impacting more directly on their purses and their livelihoods. However, residents were still noticeably vague about the Clean Air Zone, with a lack of clarity about what it hopes to achieve, where and from when it will be applicable and how it is going to be enforced. This suggests that there is something



else at play here too, around what information is reaching them and how much they are taking in. Other highly significant policies that are already in place in Bristol were rarely mentioned, either in person or online. We expected online respondents to show more familiarity with local climate change strategies but even then, those who answered 'yes' to knowing about local climate change policies could only name one or two.

This lack of knowledge and awareness about actual or planned policy changes is striking. Does it relate to a lack of interest in citywide strategic thinking, and/or reflect the quality and accessibility of strategic communications about climate change at a local level? This in turn leads to further questions about how and where information about local climate mitigation strategies are shared - for example, where do residents seek out such information and which sources do they trust the most when they do? When asked about this, people talked about social media and other media outlets which they trusted, as well as the importance of word of mouth.

Where people get information from	
Information source	Resident answers
Social media	49
Bristol Post	44
Facebook	42
Newspapers	37
Word of mouth	37
TV	32
Bristol City Council	30
Radio	20
Cable	11
Bristol 24-7	10
Leaflets / flyers / posters	10
Guardian	7

While Bristolians seem to collect information on climate change from a range of sources, our responses suggested that they tend to trust information from Bristol City Council on climate change initiatives over other news or social media outlets. Nonetheless, there were also significant levels of distrust shared with our researchers, often linked to an assessment of the perceived integrity of policy decisions and visible follow-through of proposed ideas.

Among the many issues raised around climate change communication was the fact that information from the Council was not easily accessible. Some talked of how they found the website confusing, with one person asking the researcher if they could recommend any good sources or reliable information about Council plans:

- *'I have no knowledge of any policy that is being put in place in response to the climate emergency.'*
- *'We don't know how to access information... you cannot just walk into the town hall and ask for information.'*
- *'They are likely to portray their plans in a positive light and will erase any missed opportunities from the text'*

Asked about local actions people were aware of, a notable response was considerable disillusionment about Bristol City Council's stated intentions versus the actual implementation of policies. Residents describe this as a failure to follow through with initiatives or to introduce policy shifts that are radical enough to affect real change. To some degree, this could reflect a lack of understanding of policy 'practicalities', with some people attributing policies such as ineffective public transport to the City Council or local government alone. Others, though, clearly understood the limitations of what the Council can achieve:

- *'It all seems a bit bleak with this government in power at the moment - constrains what the City Council can do even if they are willing'*
- *'The City Council ultimately has to respond, but the big decisions rest at national and international levels'*
- *'I am hopeful for Bristol pioneering change, but it is the big companies and governments that need to make changes right now.'*

### 3. How responses differed across the city

A key aim of this research was to talk to people across the entire city. As the maps below show, we collected a good spread of responses, both face-to-face and via the online survey. Researchers intentionally targeted specific areas where responses were low, but this was cut short due to Covid-19 leading to greater representation of more central areas.

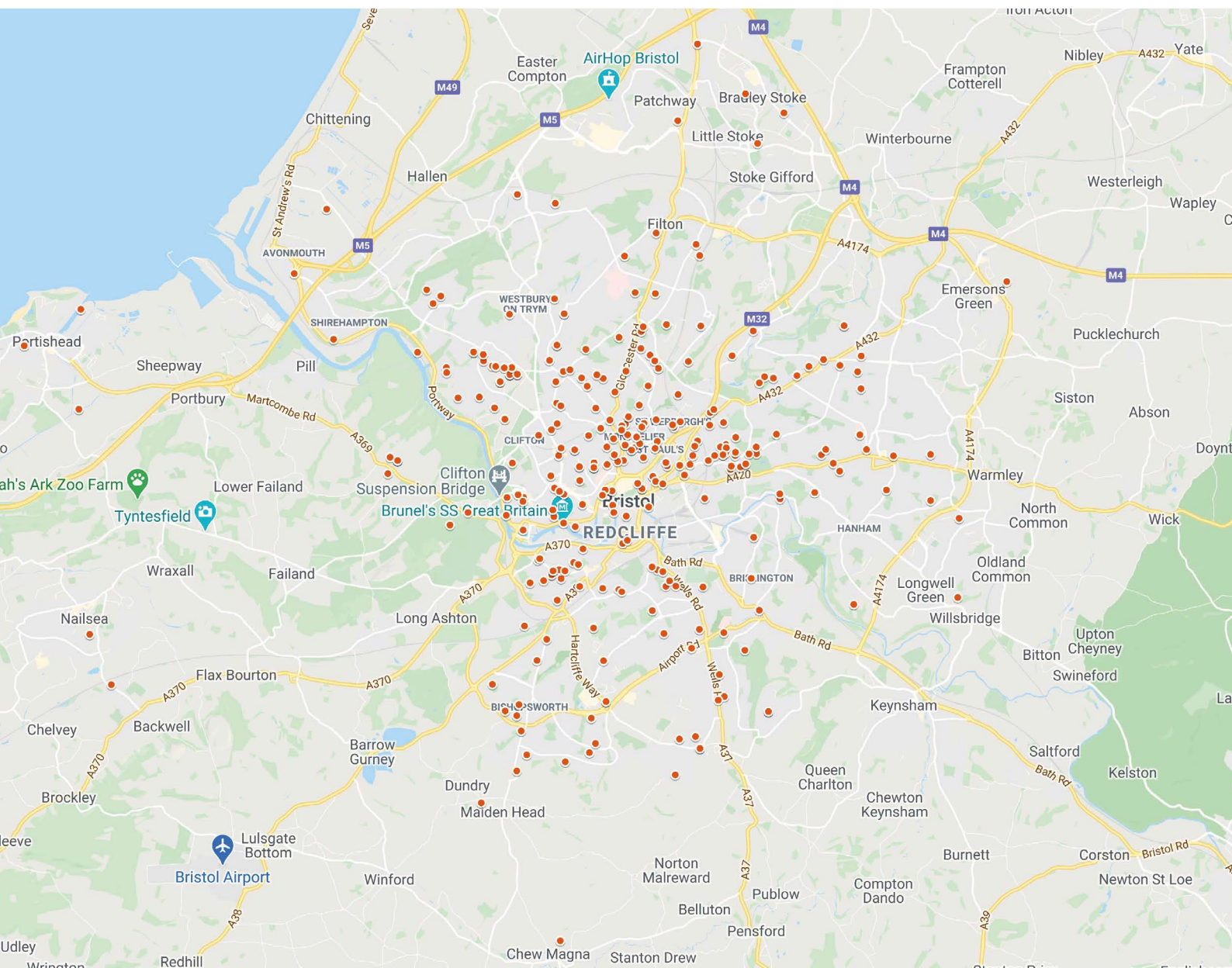
In the interviews on Bristol streets, different perspectives emerged from different areas of the city, most noticeably around the proposed Clean Air Zone. In the city's more central areas, those living in or close to the edges of the diesel ban zone expressed fears that it will create more diesel traffic and will actually

adversely affect air quality and congestion in their areas. As one participant in St Pauls pointed out, *'The diesel ban for the centre has more to do with air quality than climate change, but will affect BS2 really badly because people will just drive around outside the city centre more.'* St Pauls (part of Bristol's BS2 postcode area) is very close to the city centre and yet not part of the identified zone. Its non-inclusion seems to have exacerbated a general feeling of the area being ignored in city policy, possibly as part of a wider process of historical neglect.

Those living on the outskirts of Bristol and just beyond frequently drew attention to what they see as a lack of coherence and cross-area thinking in relation to public transport. Many suggested that their areas had been *'left behind'* by recent transport policy. Among

### Participant postcodes:

#### Face-to-face interviews





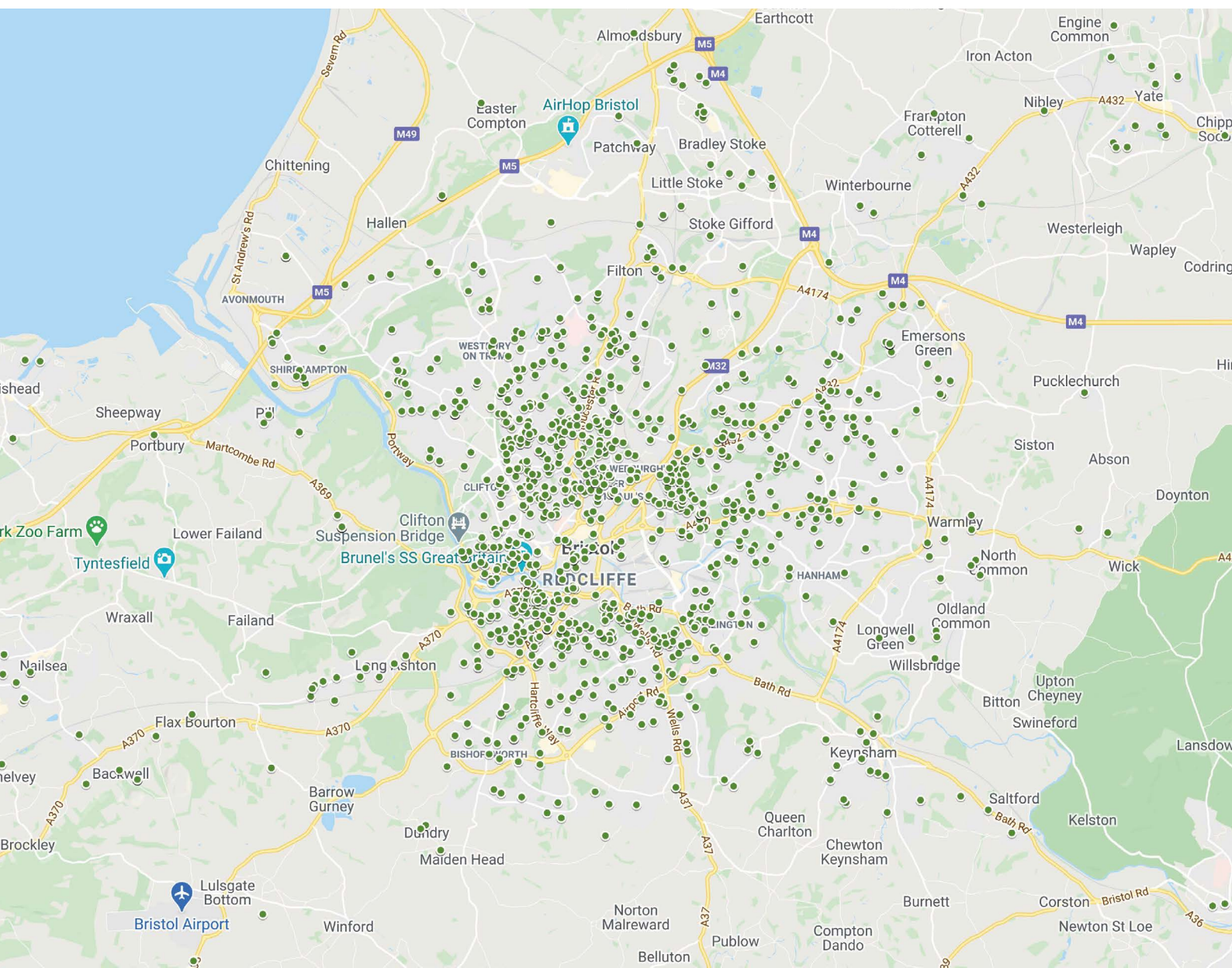
the many many comments we collected, people called for investment in a *'better transport system across the city, not just the centre'*, with requests for previously discontinued train and bus stops to be brought back and for more runs in non-central areas. Others suggested that with the introduction of a Clean Air Zone there is no easy and accessible way for them to access the city centre.

- *'One change local to us has not been helpful at all. The link road might help with congestion in the city but pushes traffic into different zones. A country road has now become a main road - just as congested - and we are badly affected.'*

- *'Extend the cycle path to Clevedon to Yatton to promote cycling, not car use'*
- *'People feel negative about the driving ban, like it's isolating South Bristol. I understand the reasons for it but what about people from South Bristol? How are they going to access North Bristol and the motorway - it's already difficult enough as it is.'*

Some participants expressed their frustrations about the effect of the policy on local business in the outskirts. Many use vehicles for business reasons and cannot necessarily afford to change their vehicles to fit in with the diesel ban in the city centre.

## Participant postcodes: Online survey



## 4. Visions for the future

Running through all of the responses we collected, online and face-to-face, there is a sense of concern about the lack of positive action in relation to climate change impacts on Bristol. A clear appetite for what is described as ‘real’ change is expressed as a strong desire to see more concrete actions and leadership relating to mitigation strategies. When we asked residents what changes they would and would not want to see, a very frequent response was ‘any change is good’.

There is a sense that despite climate change impacts being such a pressing issue, what has been achieved to date in Bristol is essentially lip service. Our research suggests that a demand for more radical policy is backed up by a willingness to engage with significant and disruptive change if required, as long as residents understand how strategies will be effective and are confident that they will be carried through with integrity. Of the 333 people approached randomly on Bristol streets, 121 said that they were willing to accept most changes, although a quarter of those would oppose changes which exacerbated existing inequalities or ‘punished poor people’.

Most shifts that people want to see relate to the realm of policy, although this was often paired with distrust and negative opinions about the likelihood of change happening. Overall people seem to feel that the city needs to go further, and faster.

- *‘I need to make changes for myself soon in order to survive later or for my children to survive, we need system change NOW’*
- *‘Lifestyle restrictions are not appealing, but more appealing than an apocalyptic world for my child - so any change is good’*
- *‘Slow change, doing nothing, frustration that despite all the talk we are not implementing anything or engaging the public to get them on board. We are doing far too little to make the changes necessary.’*

Many people spoke positively about initiatives introduced by individuals and groups, citing civil actions, personal action and efforts to raise awareness. There was a recognition, though, that this alone was not enough:

- *‘I feel powerless because the solution is not individuals doing things. You need broader system change, a world-wide revolution. It is already too late, we can only do damage-control now. I’m not going to have children because of this.’*
- *‘Anger. Government inaction, corporate corruption, low levels of attempt, just small things like plastic and can recycling. We need systemic change.’*
- *‘All ideas so far are tinkering at the edges’*

**‘A city like Bristol could be a shining example of change’**

## 5. Impact of Covid-19

We were interested in whether the experience of Covid-19 had an impact on the willingness of Bristol residents to accept change and alter their own behaviours. Our online survey results collected in June, during the UK lockdown, presented us with an amazing opportunity to gather a snapshot of people’s feelings at such a unique moment in time.

A clear overall response to the question ‘Has Covid-19 affected your views on what actions we should take in relation to climate change? If so, how?’ was yes. The fast response of governments and local authorities to the pandemic, as well as population buy-in to necessary curbs on behaviour, made the idea of taking action on climate all the more urgent and possible.

- *‘The global response shows how quickly countries can respond to threats, it has shown what is possible when decisive action is taken by governments. We can change if the government enables us to change, major change can happen if there is political will.’*
- *‘If we can adapt so quickly to the changes forced on us by the pandemic then I feel sure we can do the same for the climate emergency. Covid-19 has forced people to use it as an opportunity to create real, radical, lasting change to cities, showing that global action on important issues is possible.’*



It seems clear Covid-19 did change views for many on what actions the city should take in relation to climate change (though not all). People expressed how working from home was a 'win-win' situation, saving money for businesses, saving time for workers in commuting and saving emissions because of the drop in traffic. Responses spoke of how:

- The environment seemed to get better during Covid-19, noting the lack of pollution during lockdown, the clear sky, bird song and clean rivers as real positives
- Less cars were a positive thing, demonstrating how much better Bristol can be for residents and visitors with minimal traffic
- More work from home reduced the need to travel as much as before
- The pent-up demand and appetite for cycling became evident as the dangers associated with cars, vans and lorries in the city was reduced
- The poor cycling road infrastructure in Bristol should be improved, focussing on more and better cycle lanes to keep up the appetite for cycling and to encourage more cycling behaviours
- There should be more support for infrastructure investment in alternative transport systems to cars, making these 'go to' methods of travel for residents
- Air quality should be prioritized more now we have had a glimpse of what improvements that would bring to day-to-day lives
- Protecting the environment has become more of a priority once residents realized how much it had been taken for granted
- Equality of impact is important to people.

As those who took part online also noted, Covid-19 made the idea of personal responsibility more prominent as well as foregrounding the huge change authorities at all levels can make if they have political will and really put effort into action. Many expressed hope that the pandemic experience is a moment of opportunity for Bristol (as long as the policy makers move fast), redirecting the city toward meaningful policy shifts and encouraging the acceptance of individual lifestyle adjustments.

However, a good number of participants inevitably worried about the potential downsides of the Covid-19 experience, including undermining previous climate change gains in Bristol such as the increased use of public transport:

- *'It shows that our actions really do make a difference and that joint efforts - local, national and international - can potentially make a huge difference'*
- *'I'm worried that public transport will be decimated as we obviously can't rely on public transportation being safe so people will likely need to continue to drive to work. It's more important than ever to encourage walking and cycling.'*
- *'It was vital we did something before Covid, and I feel that Covid will be used as an excuse to do nothing'*
- *'I think that Covid has made a lot of people think that the climate crisis can't be that important if the conversation can be dropped. But climate change will kill more people than Covid-19 did if it isn't addressed urgently.'*

***'This is a once-in-a-lifetime chance for meaningful change'***

## **6. Residents' most talked-about topics**

The most prominent reflections on where changes are needed in Bristol related to public transport, with other areas of focus including consumption and waste; the built environment and green spaces; energy; safeguarding nature; and pollution. There is a clear desire for more concrete policy and action in all these areas at a local level.

### **TRANSPORT**

Although there is recognition that some public transport reforms have already been made, residents feel that more is needed, with requests centring around reliability, accessibility and affordability. At present, car use is by far the most convenient way to cross Bristol and to reach the outskirts, but many residents are calling for more integrated and environmentally friendly transport networks in order to reduce car use and air pollution. The amount of traffic, congestion and the perceived unreliability and inaccessibility of the public transport system are heavily criticised, alongside a lack of decent cycling infrastructure. The overwhelming response to the

Clean Air Zone and diesel ban is that it does not represent enough change - only affecting the city centre and more cosmetic than providing a lasting structural solution.

- *'Need more decent public transport and a mass overhaul - not just tweaking little bits around the edges'*
- *'Improve public transport. PEOPLE NEED TO USE LESS CARS. Underground, cheaper buses, FREE BUSES! RADICAL CHANGES'*
- *'We need a cycling infrastructure that is not subservient to the needs of motor traffic - this needs to change as it is not safe and discourages use of bikes'*

## POLLUTION AND AIR QUALITY

Closely related to the theme of transport is that of pollution, seen as a huge problem in Bristol. This was talked about both in the interviews we collected before lockdown and also in the online survey in June. Online responses also commented on the poor quality of air in the city, in one case describing the city centre as 'choking' and 'horrible':

- *'Bad air. We have one of the worst in the country, and there is no excuse for it. How did we win European Green Capital? Every time I breathe, I taste pollution.'*
- *'Clean air must be the baseline that drives environmental policy in our city, a very heavily polluted city'*

## THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

This is an area of serious concern for residents, whose responses covered a wide range of topics from out-of-control construction to the related loss of green spaces and wildlife around Bristol. A number of the responses we collected contained strong emotion, from anger, fear and apathy to a lack of agency, mistrust and sadness. The importance of preserving and even increasing green spaces came up repeatedly, with an emphasis on how new builds should be environmentally sustainable and not on green sites. Residents also drew attention to the phenomenon of *'development without nearby amenities/ public transport links'*, with people in the Bristol periphery pointing out how this meant they had to rely on cars and commuting to the Centre for work, schools and basic services.

### Transport improvements wanted

- Investment into transport infrastructure such as Bristol railways, tram networks
- Improvement to bus services
- More frequent services, green buses- biofuel / biogas
- Affordable, accessible and reliable public transport
- More concessions on public transport to encourage take-up
- Pedestrianisation / no car zones
- Cycle lanes/ better cycling routes and better bike hire schemes
- Cycling infrastructure that puts cyclists on a par with the needs of cars/lorries
- Promotion of electric cars / charging points
- Traffic reduction plans, including reduction of cars in the City Centre.

- *'They should take a firmer stance on development on green space, to protect it. Building on green space takes away barriers... I live in quite a green area but I don't know how long that will last.'*
- *'Buildings, development... everywhere you look they're putting up new houses'*
- *'Where's the transport and infrastructure when they build new houses?'*

People also highlight how the construction process itself is polluting, as well as the building materials used. There are calls for construction to become more sustainable, reusing spaces, with less emissions, less concrete and the introduction of renewable options like solar panels. There is particular criticism of new builds and most especially of high rises.

As in other areas of concern, people talked about the need for support for lower-income households and those living on the streets, especially in relation to new construction and affordable housing. The comments from the face-to-face interviews were echoed and heightened in the online survey, perhaps in response to how residents became increasingly dependent on local green spaces during lockdown:



- *'All the council wants to do is build'*
- *'Local to me is now construction projects - cranes and building sites. Concrete is also very polluting – the biggest polluter of all.'*
- *'Do more for the homeless - all the big buildings empty - you could use them to keep people off the streets'*
- *'Use land for local food gardens instead of construction. There is lots of abandoned property in Bristol that could be reused.'*
- *'Plant more trees, more green spaces, and preserve them'*

## CONSUMPTION AND WASTE

Many residents mentioned consumption and waste, perhaps because these issues are part of our everyday lives or maybe because of all the recent media coverage about plastics. It may also be that these are areas where people feel they can take action themselves, although they recognise that this alone is not enough to combat climate change.

Residents have noted changes in relation to consumption and waste recycling policy and practice – *'Definitely more awareness, people are trying a bit more at work. People bring their own tupperware'* - but also see these as areas where more is needed. For many, the approach is too superficial:

- *'Stuff masqueraded as solution when it isn't'*
- *'Government inaction, corporate corruption, low levels of attempt, just small things like plastic and can recycling. We need systemic change. Ban plastic and cans altogether.'*
- *'They should publish statistics on how much of our recycling is actually recycled'*

***'If we recycled every day of our lives it still wouldn't make a difference'***

## ***'Public transport is the issue'***

### 7. Taking action: who's responsible?

Overall, the emerging picture is of confusion and helplessness with residents feeling that their ability to act is limited. There is a perception of climate change as too big to solve, diminishing their sense of being able to make a meaningful contribution. Many people express how they are trying to *'do their part'* but are aware of this only being a relatively small contribution to climate change action. For some, this is leading to a reluctance to engage, as just thinking about it causes negative emotions and cycles of despair:

- *'It's already too late... nothing ever changes, nothing seems to ever work'*
- *'Not much individually I can do'*
- *'I don't think we can change it, it's beyond man's control'*
- *'It will happen no matter what, it's going to change, we can't stop it'*
- *'Hopeless, how can I stop it?'*
- *'I can't make any difference on my own'*
- *'On my own, I don't have the power to change it'*
- *'Hopeless, fear, terrified and desperate. But also unfeeling and closed-off, disavowal. I go to work pretending nothing is happening.'*

On the other hand, the responses also include expressions of cautious optimism, some relating to Bristol itself, others related to the active engagement of younger generations and to the behavioural shifts they know of personally or see happening around them:

- *'I have seen small local projects engage local people in making their neighbourhoods better and think those type of schemes have massive potential. Council-run stuff gets tied down with all their other responsibilities/budgets etc. and goes painfully slowly. I believe people are often quite happy to do something if they are shown the way, volunteering and donating to feel good.'*
- *'Youth are more aware and willing to change'*

Unsurprisingly, given such a complex and multi-faceted issue, people express many contradictory positions, sometimes across a single interview or survey response. One prominent idea that emerged is that behavioural change is seen as a civic duty that everyone should play a part in. Interestingly, however, the language used to explain this idea more often referred to *'they'* or *'people'* rather than to *'I'* or *'we'*:

- *'People should change their eating habits, walk more, drive less, eat less meat'*
- *'Remind people to turn things off'*
- *'People understand, but they take no initiative!'*
- *'People could make changes, but not doing anything'*
- *'Disempowered because others don't recognise the problem'*
- *'Public need to get more active'*

How much do people think of themselves as part of the *'they'*? In one interview, someone told us *'government is not doing anything, people are not doing anything'* while laughing about his plastic bottle. It seems there is more to understand about the relationship between *'public awareness'* and *'responsibility to act'*. A number of responses suggested that other people (rather than themselves) need to be better educated on the matter as a route to changing behaviours:

- *'I study science so I understand it, but what about those who don't?'*
- *'I have a higher level of understanding, but there needs to be more accessible information'*
- *'More information for those who don't actively seek it'*

One key theme in the online survey responses is that any changes introduced in the city to mitigate climate change impacts must be inclusive and not have a disproportionate impact on lower socioeconomic groups. Large numbers expressed how essential it was that any future policy changes avoided exacerbating financial inequalities in what is seen as an already very unequal city.

This concern about the lack of equality included references to the discrepancy of responsibility in relation to climate change laid on big business at the one end of the scale and on small businesses and the average layperson at the other:

- *'Environmental taxes are regressive and affect poor people most'*
- *'Nothing that pushes people who are already poor more into poverty'*
- *'Small businesses follow the rules and get penalized but big business gets away with everything, greenwashing while small business need to increase their prices and then close down'*

## ***'Covid has made people more aware of how unequal the burdens are'***

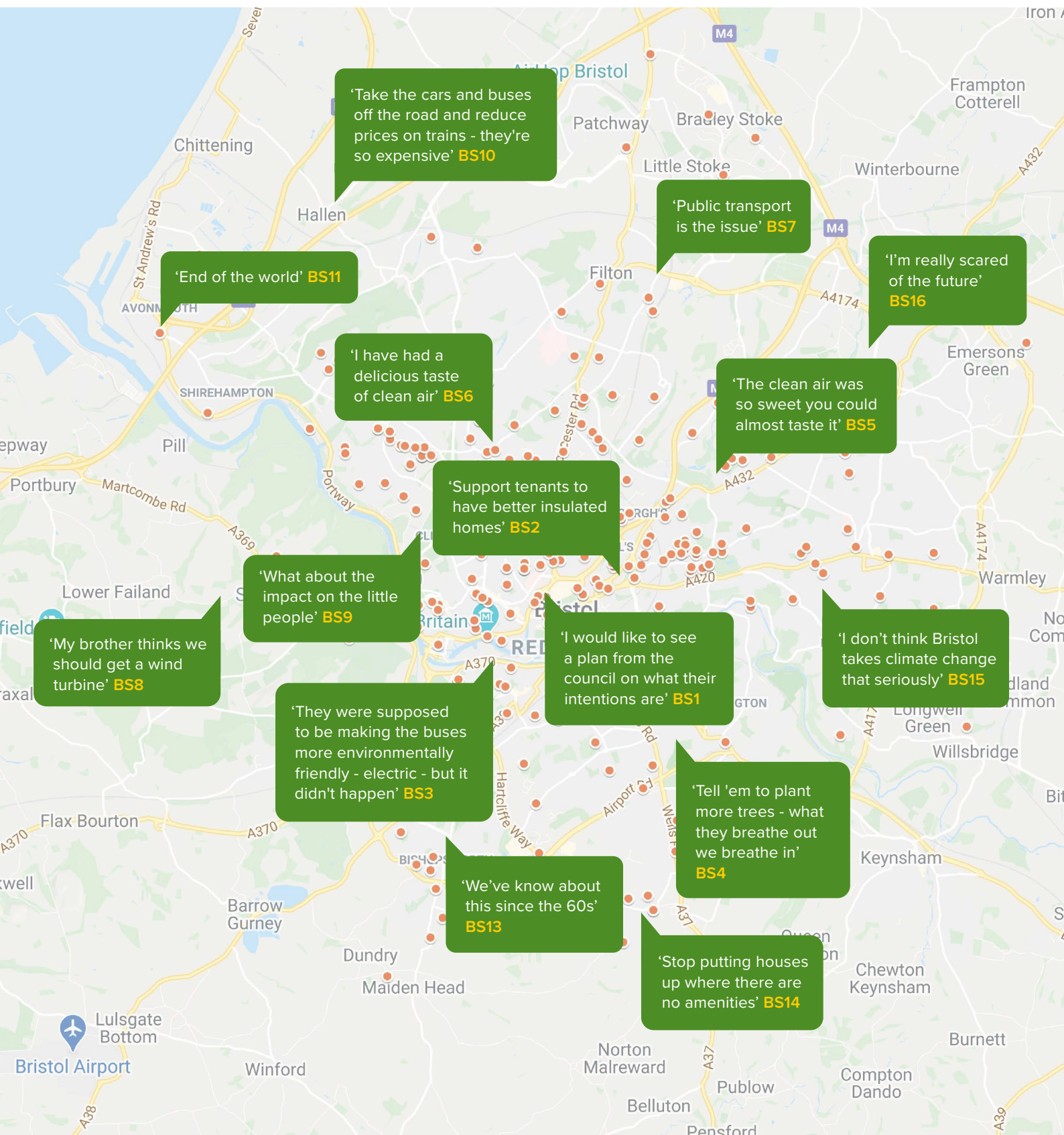
These sentiments highlight a sense of disillusionment and anger among residents, with the potential knock-on effect of increasing levels of apathy and a lack of motivation in undertaking behavioural change. People's responses also suggest that a desire to be *'responsible green citizens'* is hindered by a lack of financial resources.

The idea of being *'priced out of sustainability'* is expressed in many different ways, with environmentalism regarded as a phenomenon only open to the wealthy and well off. There is an overlap here with residents' responses about transport, which they feel needs to be more affordable and accessible, as well as a call for more financial support for other sustainability initiatives.

- *'Schools do not have the money to pay for the bins they need to help recycle - they [the Council] should give them to the schools.'*
- *'Only middle-class people can afford to shop like this, whereas poorer people are forced to buy cheap shitty products... paper is significantly more expensive than plastic [plates]'*
- *'With car changes, rich people can afford to buy a new car but poor people cannot afford that'*
- *'I don't want more inequality - changes that affect parts of society that aren't well off'*



# What Bristolians are saying across the city...



## ***'I'd like to see the Council actually implement change - it's all just talk at the moment'***

### **8. Citywide leadership**

A link between disillusionment with bigger actors and the undermining of individual motivation emerged as we looked for references to citywide leadership on climate change action. It became clear that the Council plays an important role, referred to in multiple ways in our responses from 'Council' and 'local government' to 'the mayor', 'the city' or simply as 'they'.

Residents seem to feel that the Council is not meeting the climate change-related commitments it has made, citing the fact that declaring a climate emergency or becoming European Green Capital had not resulted in substantial changes. In many cases, residents gave examples of their perception of the city leadership contradicting its green goals through unsustainable policies, such as the Mayor's support for the airport expansion. A good example of how Council messaging and actions are viewed with confusion was the alleged purchase of new diesel vehicles for council use immediately after announcing an imminent diesel ban – a story told a few times to our researchers.

There was comment on the Council's management of transport, traffic, unsustainable investments, lack of action and change, high levels of construction, a lack of communication and poor leadership. Many responses suggested that the Council is slow and ineffective, closed-off and not transparent enough, and making investments to boost its own financial gain and personal incentives in the interests of others rather than Bristol residents:

- *'If there's money to be made, climate change doesn't matter'*
- *'The Mayor gets 4 years and promises are never realised before the next one arrives'*
- *'Lots of talk but not enough action or leading by the front from the Council'*

While some had more faith, speaking of how they are 'confident in the current leadership – MPs, Mayor, councillors' and how they see this Bristol administration as a 'green council, working to deal with the issues

facing them', others wondered whether the Council is 'frightened to tell people how habits and lifestyles must change'. The high level of feeling about inconsistent and mixed messaging from the Council is illustrated by the comments below:

- *'Bristol has a good attitude. Very positive. Can seem really progressive but at the end of the day it is still not sustainable. On the surface lots seem to be happening but we remain a city with much traffic etc.'*
- *'Hypocrisy. The liberal green image is bullshit. We are the European Green Capital but our Mayor still comes out in support of the Bristol Airport Expansion. The public transport is really bad and expensive.'*

Residents' frustration with the lack of action was expressed through frequent references to distrust, uncertainty and anger when current policies were mentioned. At the heart of these critiques is a desire for more - much more - concrete policy action at both local and national levels. People want to see the Council 'trying things and taking risks and not to be afraid of making difficult and unpopular decisions'.

What they do not want is the Council 'giving in to consumerist and business pressure and backing away from real change'.







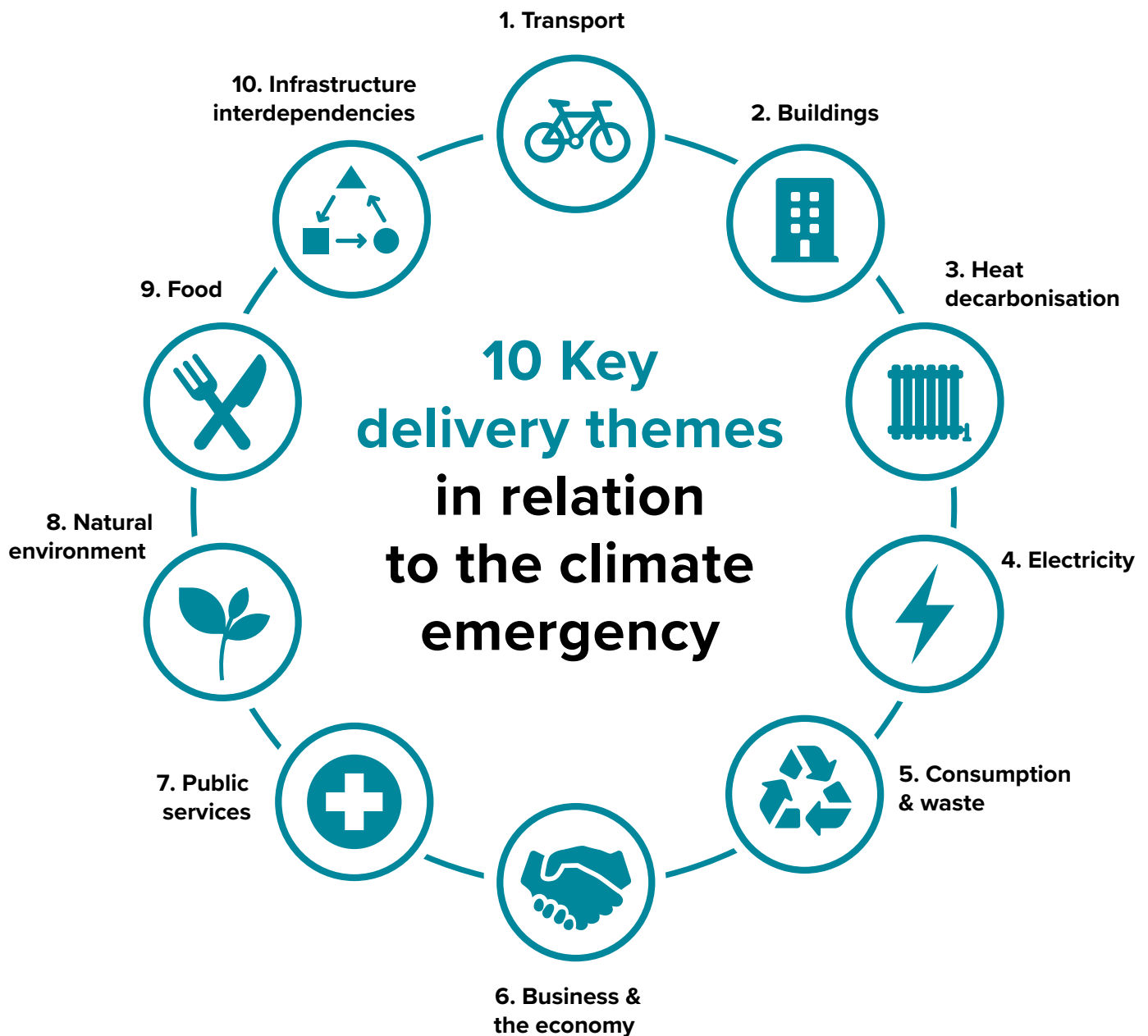
## The One City Climate Strategy: current climate change mitigation policy

In November 2018 Bristol City Council passed a [motion to declare a climate emergency](#), with a commitment that the Mayor report back with a plan within 6 months. In July 2019, this was followed by the [Mayor's Climate Emergency Plan](#), setting out the urgent challenges faced by the council and the city in relation to the climate emergency and its impacts on the city. In February 2020, [Bristol's One City Climate Strategy](#) was published, setting out a city-wide approach to climate change under key delivery themes. This was commissioned by the [One City Environment Board](#) and formally endorsed by the Mayor on behalf of Bristol City Council on March 3rd, 2020.

The One City governance structure in Bristol recognises that while Bristol City Council has a significant responsibility and leadership role in acting on climate change, it cannot directly deliver everything that is needed. Businesses, communities, the wider public sector and individuals all have a part to play. The One City Environment Board is made up

of representatives from across all sectors. Bristol City Council is in the process of writing their delivery plan for the actions within their remit.

As the One City Climate Strategy is the most up-to-date and strategic document shaping Bristol's response to the climate emergency, this is the policy document we have referred to in relation to communicating Bristol's action on climate change. As can be seen in the diagram below, the One City Climate Strategy consists of 10 key delivery themes and areas of focus across all aspects of Bristol development into the future. It is informing current council action as well as detailed actions and policies to be taken over the next few years. In the following table, we draw together the various climate-related objectives for each of the climate strategy areas, and then link these to residents' comments to see how well these policy objectives, and their implications, are currently understood by those living and working in the city.





## 2030 policy objectives in the One City Climate Strategy

As the One City climate strategy sets out, to achieve its aims by 2030 we need actions at every level of each of the 10 identified areas of change. Below, we draw together the various objectives for each of these areas, in some cases changing the language to make the implications more understandable.

	Objective 1	Objective 2	Objective 3	Objective 4 & 5
<b>1. Transport</b>	Reduction in car and freight mileage around 40% with a move to public transport, walking and cycling and coordination of deliveries.	All Bristol's cars to be ultra low emission vehicles (less than 75g Co2/mile by 2020; minimum of 10 miles on electric only) and 90% of other vehicles will be ultra low emissions vehicles (ULEV).	Reduce total carbon emissions from international and domestic air travel associated with residents.	Sustainable travel infrastructure: improvements to accessibility and service provision.  <b>Objective 5</b> Existing transport infrastructure and network reinforced to withstand extreme weather events.
<b>2. Buildings</b>	New buildings all carbon neutral and climate resilient (aligning heat provision to the city's heat decarbonisation programme).	Energy performance in existing buildings improved to minimise heat demand and prevent overheating.	Collaboration of stakeholders (and especially building owners / managers / users) to adapt current stock for future climate hazards.	
<b>3. Heat decarbonisation</b>	Support phasing out of gas heating, installing around 95,000 individual electric heat pumps in well insulated buildings.	Around 65,000 buildings connected to heat networks to support the phasing out of gas heating in Bristol.		
<b>4. Electricity</b>	Extensive adoption of smart electricity solutions to support the decarbonisation of the national grid.	Maximisation of renewable generation within the city, including approximately 350MW solar electricity.	Local electricity network made more resilient to accommodate increased demand as more electricity is used for heat and transport.	
<b>5. Consumption and waste</b>	Shift in Bristol's retail economy to focus on high quality, durable products that can be easily repaired.	Principles of responsible consumption adopted by all, including using and buying less and buying carbon neutral goods and services.	Significant levels of waste reduction (particularly for food, textiles and plastic).	At least 65% of all 'waste' is repaired, recycled or re-used.

	Objective 1	Objective 2	Objective 3	Objective 4
<b>6. Business and economy</b>	Carbon neutral businesses and organisations, with annual recording and measurement of scope 1, 2 & 3 Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions of direct and supply chains, as per the GHG Protocol.	Businesses (especially those with large GHG footprints) to receive training, engagement, management and operation support to reduce their emissions.	The development of a collaborative business strategy to avoid climate hazards, with assistance prioritised to the most vulnerable.	Bristol continues to attract businesses working in the 'green revolution' bringing varied jobs to the city.
<b>7. Public services, including voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE)</b>	All Bristol public / VCSE service organisations to be carbon neutral, with annual recording/ measurement of scope 1, 2 & 3 GHG emissions of direct and supply chains, as GHG Protocol.	All organisations (especially those with large GHG footprints) to receive training, engagement, management and operation support to reduce their emissions.	Development of a collaborative public and VCSE strategy to avoid climate hazards, with assistance prioritised to the most vulnerable.	Public and VCSE sector to build on its leadership position, sharing lessons from its earlier transition with other organisations in the city.
<b>8. Natural environment</b>	All new construction projects to use appropriate blue (water ways) and green (parks) infrastructure to protect from future climate events; to provide ecological improvements; and to enhance carbon sequestration (absorption) of all developments.	The city's natural environment (including canopy cover and biodiversity) has been restored, preserved and enhanced to maximise carbon sequestration in carbon sinks, climate resilience and health and wellbeing.	Everyone lives and works within a 10 minute walk of a quality green space with sufficient tree canopy cover to provide refuge for citizens during climate-change induced extreme heat conditions.	Wildlife friendly businesses and organisations - habitats, bird boxes, green infrastructure, etc - in an effort to recover wildlife lost as a result of climate change or urbanisation.
<b>9. Food</b>	Sustainable and low carbon food options available to everyone in all future climates, respectful of all dietary and cultural requirements.	Specific carbon neutral, climate resilient food supply and distribution solutions will be implemented in the Bristol city region.	Maximisation of sustainable and resilient urban food production, used as a mechanism for active community participation and education in food sustainability.	Citizens to have a more plant-based diet, minimise food waste and support increase in the market for sustainable and carbon neutral food.
<b>10. Infrastructure interdependence</b>	Provision of vital services, such as water and sewerage, maintained in all but the most extreme circumstances.	Infrastructure providers understand how different aspects of infrastructure affect each other (e.g. how transport systems are affected by the electricity network going down) and manage the relevant risks.	Collaborate to improve the resilience of infrastructure systems from extreme weather events.	Infrastructure stakeholders work together to develop cross sector, whole system carbon neutral solutions.





# Current strategy in light of residents' views

## 1. Transport

The Transport Objectives 1-5 set out in the One City Climate Strategy are far reaching and would see a massive shift in the quality and type of public transport options across the city. Both bold and radical, they will fundamentally shift transport and road use in Bristol away from the presumed right of the car. The many and critical views expressed by residents about Bristol's current transport system show a strong public mandate for these changes, alongside important caveats:

- New transport plans should take into account the whole city and not isolate the 'forgotten' periphery by focussing just on the centre. Residents of South Bristol in particular feel cut off. Policies that affect only the centre (such as the Clean Air Zone) raise concerns about impacts in neighbourhoods immediately adjoining the centre.
- The experience of lockdown has given residents a taste of what it would be like to have reduced car traffic in the city, in terms of air quality and noise pollution benefits. This can be a source of motivation for change.
- Residents recognise the caution about public transport in the context of Covid-19, but most online survey respondents expressed a desire for public transport to be a major part of medium term transport plans of Bristol.
- Clear communication of the citywide transport plans for transformation, including details of phasing and longterm coordination, is essential. For example, Bristolians in one part of the city need to know why their local bus service is not going to be improved until 2028 while others will benefit from an upgraded service from 2024.
- Changes should be equitable, with costs distributed fairly and proportionately to those most able to shoulder them. This is particularly relevant to the aspiration to renew the city's car fleet with ultra low-emission vehicles (ULEV) such as electric cars (Transport Objective 2).
- Demonstrating the achievability of policies is important to get residents' buy-in. For example, the aspiration that all vehicles will be ULEV by 2030 needs more detail to win their trust on how the city's car fleet will be transformed in an inclusive manner within this timeframe.

Transforming Bristol's transport system would be well-suited to being addressed by a citizens' assembly or similar democratic process. It is the main climate strategy area where residents want to see change, where there is widespread dissatisfaction, and where a coordinated and long term response is required. While critical voices are vehement, residents demonstrated more nuanced views than can be expressed in response to piecemeal policies, and frequently expressed criticism of lack of joined-up planning.

## 2 & 3. Buildings; Heat decarbonisation

These delivery themes were not mentioned much by residents - just two people in the on-street survey used the word '*insulation*' and none spoke of '*retrofit*' - and yet they involve a huge amount of building and infrastructure work to meet the 2030 policy objectives. This includes increasing the energy efficiency of buildings and moving away from gas to renewable electricity for heating.

- Given resident views that the centre of Bristol is experiencing a more positive transformation than peripheral areas, it is important that early actions are taken across the whole of greater Bristol, again with clear signage about their purpose.
- It is important that routes to financial support for low income households to improve their homes are communicated clearly and early. Support and equal access to the benefits of city changes were important to residents in this research.
- Many of these changes will be highly visible and disruptive on the ground in Bristol (such as mass insulation and installation of district heating). Posters and signage at sites where this work is taking place would ensure that passers-by recognise the significance of ground works as part of Bristol's response to climate change.

This all points to a need for better communication of the role of building energy efficiency and heating system changes in the overall strategy, and also to the language used to describe these objectives. Although the majority of residents' concerns about the built environment were focused on the loss of green space as a result of new building work, there is an opportunity here to use the potential visibility of buildings and heat decarbonisation to demonstrate

### **What is a Citizens' Assembly?**

This is a representative group of citizens selected at random to learn about a particular issue or set of issues. They then deliberate on the topic through listening to different points of view, discussion and reflection before making recommendations. In January 2020, Bristol City Council passed a [motion to Reboot Democracy](#) in the city, with proposals for deliberative democracy that include citizens assemblies.

how concrete actions are being taken. This in turn might address concerns that Bristol's response to climate change is lip service.

## 4. Electricity

The One City Climate Strategy calls for maximising renewable energy generation, including installing smart technologies (Objective 1), the use of 350MW solar and grid reinforcement (Objective 2).

- Only 13% of our on-the-street interviewees mentioned energy at all and less than 8% talked about solar or wind renewable energy. Most of those talked about solar energy.
- No residents we spoke to on the street mentioned smart meters.

Decarbonisation of electricity does not seem to be at the forefront of Bristol residents' thinking about local action on climate change. This may be because electricity is experienced as '*behind-the-scenes*' infrastructure, seen as a national issue or one that is far away from people's everyday lives. This is in striking contrast to the high volume of views we heard about transport, which people interact with every day and feel frustrated by.

## 5. Consumption and waste

Consumption and waste Objective 1 implies a complete transition to high quality, durable products that can be easily repaired by 2030. This goes much further than the focus on plastic that formed the major part of resident responses in relation to consumption and waste. In practice, this objective would result in an increase in the price of everyday products, which may in turn lead to a greater reliance on leasing/hire-purchase arrangements. This implies extra costs (such as interest payments) for anyone who can't afford to buy a product outright, and conflicts with residents' demands not to put the burden of change onto those less able to pay.

To address this, affordable and low interest finance would be important. This would match the express desire of residents for inclusive, equitable policies that do not put pressure on those less able to pay. There might be a potential role here for organisations such as the Bristol Credit Union and other micro-financing structures to take a lead.



## 6 & 7. Business and the economy; Public services

The One City Climate Strategy identifies profound changes that all organisations in the city will have to make, from large businesses to small charities. From our research, it seems residents feel strongly that businesses should pull their weight, alongside a leading role from Bristol City Council. Regular monitoring and reporting on the progress of different sectors would ensure that residents are aware of how this is happening, supported by:

- Clear sector-specific action plans
- Clarity on funding to support the development of action plans and the training, education and management programmes needed

The appropriate sources of funding to support this change and education in VCSE, public and business sectors could also be the topic of a deliberative process to generate an approach best suited to business buy-in.

## 8. Natural environment

Residents who responded to the surveys reported a strong desire to augment green spaces in the city and to protect those that currently exist from new building developments. This underlines the importance of

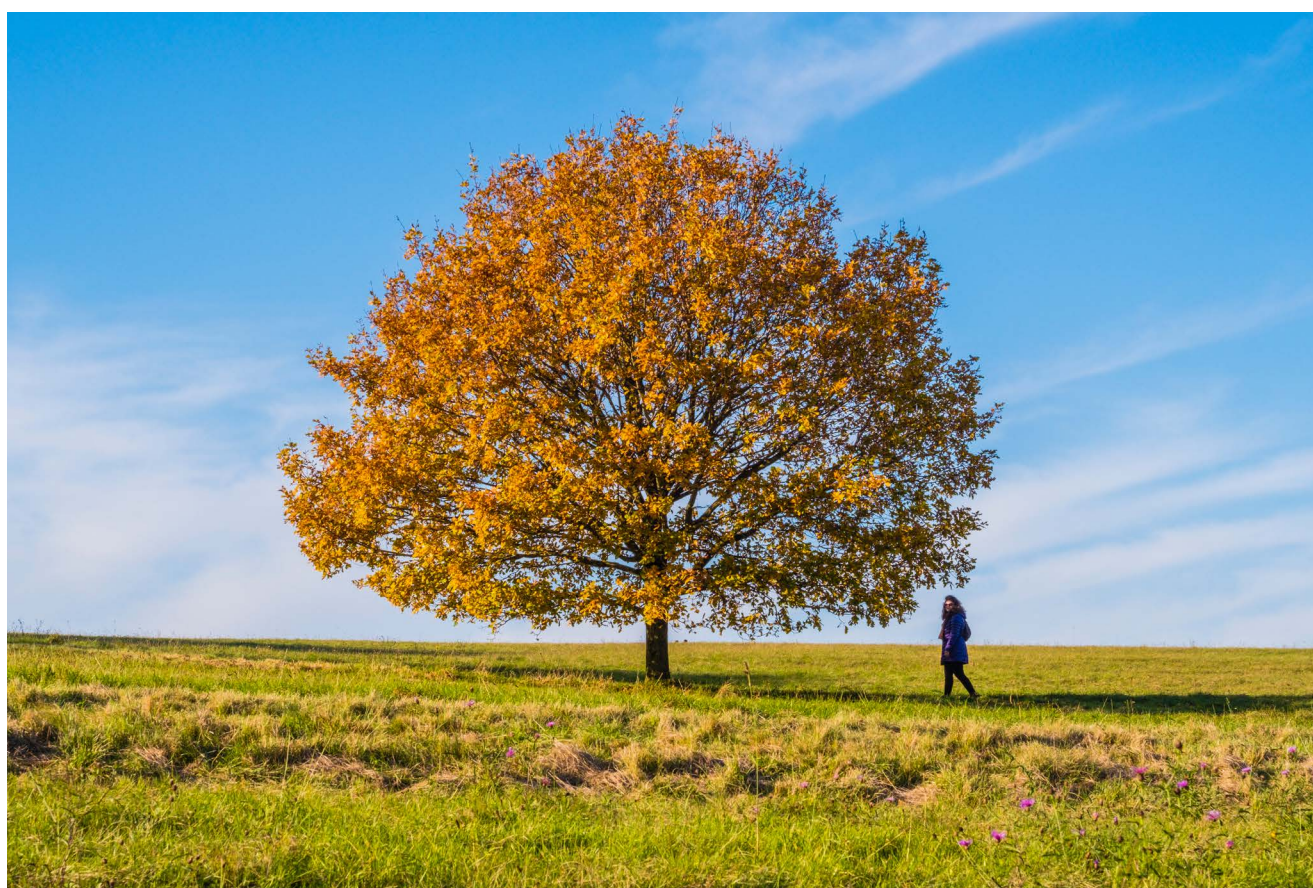
Objective 3 - to achieve a maximum of 10 minute walk for residents and workers in Bristol to a '*quality open green space*' - which become noticeably more important to residents in the online survey responses collected during lockdown.

## 9. Food

Although food was not front-of-mind for most people we spoke to, it seems from the comments we did receive that Bristolians are in tune with Climate Strategy objectives. About 15% of residents made a connection between climate change and food, mentioning the growth of local food, reduced meat consumption and minimising plastic packaging of food. Comments about vegetarianism and veganism were mixed, with some supportive and some resistant to diet change.

## 10. Infrastructure interdependence

The One City Climate Strategy Objectives around infrastructure interdependence are primarily focused on resilience to future climate change and managing infrastructure in an integrated way. Less than 4% of Bristol residents in the on-street survey mentioned '*infrastructure*'. When they did it was in the context of transport, flood defences and new construction projects. There was a low level of engagement with the idea of infrastructure interdependence.





# Implications and recommendations

As far as we are aware, this piece of research is a unique attempt at accessing the thoughts of Bristolians about climate change across all groups and all areas of the city, and especially those whose views would not necessarily be heard. We think it also sheds light on which of the current actions are understood and have broad acceptance among residents and which do not.

To date, the research has produced the following insights:

- Bristol residents are concerned about climate change and this fear both motivates willingness to change and holds people back from action.
- They are willing to see radical change in the city, and are frustrated with the lack of visible steps that have been taken so far.
- Transport is the biggest area of concern talked about both before and during the Covid-19 lockdown.
- Equality and fairness is important to Bristol residents, including an expectation that all sectors should pull their weight and that the cost of adaptation to climate change should not be carried by, or lead to the exclusion of, those least able to pay.
- Residents expect a high level of integrity from Bristol City Council, and goodwill towards the council is undermined when policies are perceived as contradictory.

## Recommendations

We hope that this piece of work will contribute to the ongoing development of the One City Climate Strategy, and especially to how the changes involved are communicated to residents to keep them informed and motivated to make necessary adjustments to their lifestyles. In brief, we suggest:

**Boldness** Residents are willing to accept radical change as long as this comes with integrity, as in visible follow-through of ideas that are proposed. In particular, this relates to changes that improve the public transport system and infrastructure in the city.

**Consistency** Consistent and well-communicated policy from city leadership in relation to climate change we believe would generate goodwill among residents. This may also increase buy-in to making personal lifestyle shifts. Clear and frequent communications similar to the Covid-19 update email update from the Mayor would help to avoid confusion and mistrust, and challenge perceptions of hypocrisy and lack of follow-through.

**Costs** The financial implications of making the changes set out in the One City Climate Strategy need to be clear and discussed upfront. For example, transport Objective 2 needs details about subsidies and alternative types of ULEV ownership and use options to be included in plans as a matter of urgency to reassure



those on lower incomes. Costs and benefits to different socio-economic groups should be detailed alongside each objective.

**Detail** People are thinking globally, not locally. There is a need to shift the discussion around climate change to a local concern, focussing on what it will mean for local communities. Objectives in the Climate Strategy need to be translated into detailed local action plans as a priority, separating out what are national / regional responsibilities and what can be achieved at the citywide and neighbourhood level.

**Equality** Residents from across all areas of the city are adamant that changes and newly introduced strategies must be inclusive and not make existing inequalities worse. This refers to income levels as well as geographic disadvantage. As new policies and their objectives are introduced, how the new ideas affect different parts of the Bristol population needs to be clearly set out, with implications for individual and local impact.

**Honesty** There is a general sense of fear and foreboding in the city which needs to be acknowledged to support Bristol's population and to keep their motivation to act in place. Being honest about the scale of the problem, clarity about what can be achieved and how, and transparency about costs and implications will lessen anxiety and confusion across the city.

**Imagination** As this issue is so crucial and motivating for younger generations, harnessing their imaginations and energy is vital for lasting change. One example: start an ongoing citywide video project, with young people asking friends, families and networks about about the things they do for the environment and why. One-minute video clips of all ages and backgrounds could be used to build momentum among residents and also address the growing gap between younger and older generations over this issue.

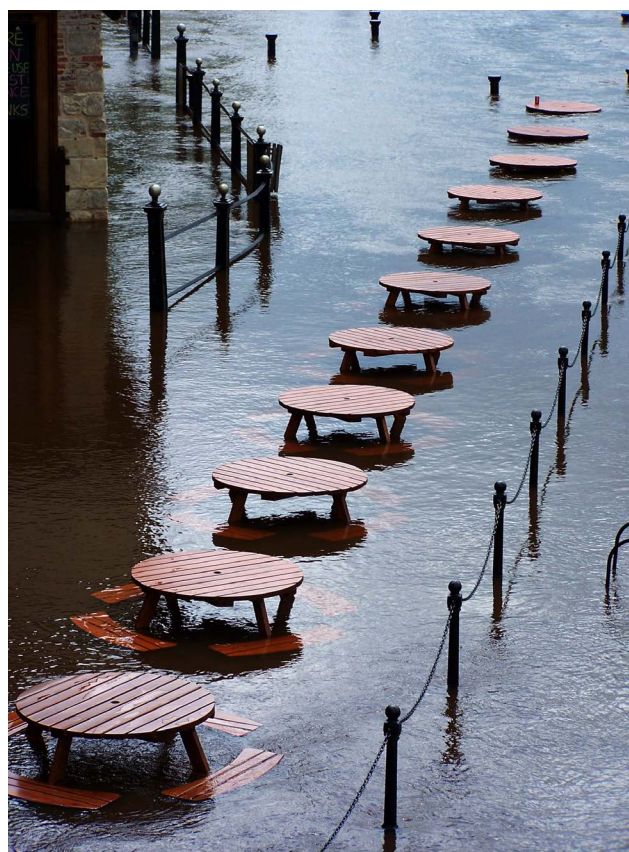
**Inclusion** The One City approach is positive as it uses council leadership to include sectors beyond the council. It could be extended to include greater citizen participation. A new leadership approach which introduces and promotes youth and citizen participation would contribute greater understanding and buy-in, as well as different perspectives, to the ongoing development, implementation and communication of the One City Climate Strategy objectives.

**Leadership** As the One City plan points out, this is an issue that affects us all, with all of us - individuals, organisations, businesses, Bristol City Council - needing to play their parts. By stepping up to the role of 'talking

shop', the anxieties about council commitment to climate change strategy and action could be reduced. It could take the lead in providing space to consider plans and thinking through the running of such services before commissioning, alongside representatives of all the different sectors and groups included in the plan.

**Transparency** As the research shows, Bristol City Council is generally trusted by residents in the city when it comes to information and guidance about climate change issues. There are radical proposals included in the One City Climate Strategy that ought to be communicated widely to demonstrate that the council is acting decisively and boldly. A communications campaign on concrete actions is needed to improve the public's understanding of policies.

**Visibility** People don't really understand climate change impacts at a local level, or the strategic plans in place to work on those. The One City Environment board could instigate a highly visible and ongoing public campaign to highlight the reasons for small actions already being taken. This could be on billboards, buses and bus shelters, for example, and at points of disruption where infrastructure improvements are taking place, alongside clearer online provision of information through the council website.





What Bristol residents  
want on climate change:

WALKING  
WANT  
CLEAN  
AIR  
LESS CARS  
RENEWABLE ENERGY  
FOSSIL  
FUELS  
BAN  
GOOD  
PUBLIC  
TRANSPORT  
CYCLES  
LESS PLASTIC  
GREEN SPACE  
GARDENS  
HOUSING  
LESS TRAFFIC  
PEDESTRIAN  
ZONES



